New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1955

Volume XVI, Number 21 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of November 14, 1955

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 14, 1955*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Vamp"

The New York Times

November 11, 1955

Theatre: Carol Channing

Portrays 'The Vamp' in Winter Garden Show

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THERE is nothing wrong with the basic idea of "The Vamp," which opened last night at the Winter Garden. John Latouche and Sam Locke, authors of the book, offer Carol Channing in the role of a motion picture vamp in the primeval days of the screen industry.

Offering Miss Channing in almost any role verges on inspiration. For she is a likable comic with a rangy style and a pair of large, innocent eyes. As the seasons go by she looks less and less like flesh and blood and more and more like an animated cartoon. Now she has also learned how to make her singing voice sound like a jew's harp—all twangy, deep and mellow. No one knows where her broad accent comes from. It's like a bad dream of the Middle West, and very funny.

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Like any other performer, Miss Channing is most amusing when she has a part to work on, like the dumb gold-digger in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" and the bewildered immigrant from Ohio in "Wonderful Town." Only the first scene in "The Vamp" has as much to offer. It introduces Miss Channing as a farm maiden in the rural areas of the Bronx years ago.

Her rushing entrance as she attends to all the farm chores at once is fabulous in the Channing manner; and, in the opinion of one theatregoer, the high point of the show. "Keep Your Nose to the Grindstone" is the anthem for this number. With Will Geer hopping around in his familiar rustic style, Sandyl Cordell singing a fine soprano and Miss Channing sounding like a female baritone, the grindstone song seems to promise a robust, knockabout show.

•

But the idea of burlesquing the old-fashioned vamp has been lost somewhere in the confusion of a labored book. "The Vamp" carries the screen industry from its early days in Fourteenth Street to Hollywood. It burlesques everything in sight from the early investors to the razzle-dazzle of sex pictures manufactured by the yard in the pioneer studios on the coast.

Perhaps that is the trouble: perhaps the satire is too general. After the promising beginning, "The Vamp" substitutes speed of performance and frenzied orchestration for the substance of a warm, nostalgic cartoon of a part of American culture. Although Mr. Latouche and Mr. Locke have a droll manner, their material is shallow.

Nor is James Mundy's music any improvement. It is loud and fast, but most of it is undistinguished. Toward the end of the evening, David Atkinson is permitted to stop acting a leading part and sing a pleasant romantic song entitled "Why Does It Have to Be You?" A first-rate singer, he gives the song professional authority. Bibi Osterwald is also a professional. She makes something gay out of "Ragtime Romeo" because she sings it with a skill and gusto.

Presumably Robert Alton's choregraphy is intended to comment ironically on the frenzy of an industry that began to flourish without an art background about forty years ago. But the comment is missing. The dancing repeats the empty, mechanical style of theatre dancing before ballet revitalized the musical theatre.

Although Raoul Pène Du Bois' costumes are jaunty, his scenery is not up to his own standard Everyone works extraordinarily hard in "The Vamp," and in the best humor. Even a disenchanted theatregoer respects the good will of theatre performers and is aware of their professional gallantry.

But noise and fury are the things most characteristic of "The Vamp." One cannot help recalling how easily Jerome Robbins said everything that "The Vamp" is trying to say in a crisp ballet about the Mack Sennett comedies a few seasons ago. Miss Channing's big, baby eyes stare through the follies of this huge show as if she could not believe what she is seeing. What she is seeing is all too true.

"THE VAMP"

Musical comedy with book by John Latouche and Sam Locke; lyrics by Mr. Latouche; music by James Mundy; based on a story by Mr. Latouche; staged by David Alexander; sets and costumes by Raoul Pene Dubois; choreography and production supervised by Robert Alton; musical direction by Milton Rosenstock; presented by Oscar Lerman, Martin Cohen and Alexander Carson at the Winter Garden Theatre, November 10, 1955. The cast:

Myron H. Hubbard...Jack Waldron
Bessie Bisco.....Bibi Osterwald
Muscle Man.....Steve Reeves
Barney Ostertag....Paul Lipson
Oliver J. Oxheart..David Atkinson
Ticket Girl.....Phyllis Dorne
Dick Hicks.....Robert Rippy
Stark Clayton..Malcolm Lee Beggs
Elsie Chelsea..Patricia Hammerlee
Bluestone.....Jack Harrold
Flora Weems...Carol Channing
Uncle Garvey.....Will Geer
Aunt Hester.....Sandyl Cordell
Fire Commissioner.....
Roger Franklin
Snake Charmer...David Neuman
Whip Man.....David Kashner
Charlie.....Matt Mattox
2nd Cameraman.....Dick Eskeli
Tyrolean Couples.....Cathryn Damon, Hugh Lambert, Helen Silver and Ron Cecil

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

November 11, 1955

Carol Channing Superbly Funny As a 'Silent' Siren in 'The Vamp'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the first scene of "The Vamp," a musical which opened last evening at the Winter Garden, Carol Channing is a healthy Bronx farm girl who cleans up all the chores—like feeding the chickens, pitching hay and hauling water from the well—in no time at all . . . and she sings bass besides. In all the loud and lusty scenes which follow she does most of the other chores, too, and no set of theatrical managers ever had a better hired girl.

Miss Channing is, to state the case briefly, superb and unique. Without her, "The Vamp" would not be as good as it is. With her, it is a grand extravaganza about the silent movies, with some pretty good music by James Mundy and some very good lyrics by John Latouche.

Buxom, bug-eyed Carol, fine comic artist that she is, couldn't be asked to carry a show of this size and weakness all alone. (The weakness is that once you have decided to spoof the silents you soon find out that there isn't very much to spoof. In order to keep the show going you have to go back and do the same burlesque in a different setting.) Miss Channing has some first-class help at the Winter Garden.

Splendid Dancing

Principal helper in "The Vamp" is Robert Alton, the dance director. Alton is the last survivor of the old school of choreographers who believe that dancers are hoofers and that hoofers should be kept hoofing until they drop dead. His dances in this new show will rattle your old bones, if you happen to have bones as old as mine are.

Other helpers include Patricia Hammerlee, who sustains a delicious caricature of Mary Pickford; Robert Rippy, who seems to combine the corniest features of W. S. Hart, Tom Mix and Broncho Billy Anderson; David Atkinson, whose middle name should be Wark; Bibi Osterwald, who proves that lady Hollywood columnists haven't changed in a half century — only aged, and Matt Mattox, a good dancer who can also act and sing. And the settings by Raoul Pene du Bois are both handsome and witty.

A Transformation

The story of "The Vamp" is no worse than a silent—only longer. A movie company on location journeys way the hell and gone up into the Bronx for some open scenery and it finds this farm girl, Miss Channing. The inspired director, Atkinson, a Svengali with a megaphone, transforms her into the sexiest man-trap since Eve. Carol, of course, remains a good girl through it all, and even falls in love with a movie cowboy. Soon the whole outfit heads west, where the sunshine was a little stronger (long before smog, obviously), and runs up a studio on a coyote-infested prairie which is lat - to become the corner of Hollywood and Vine.

Miss Channing is no less than wonderful, and she really has learned how to sing bass. If you want to see a movie siren drive men mad, don't bother with those old flickers at the Modern Museum. Go see our Carol at the Winter Garden. It will cost you more . . . but what's money these days?

Journal American

November 11, 1955

New Musical 'Cumbersome'

Carol Channing Artistry Hailed; Atkinson Gives Excellent Support

By JOHN McCLAIN

"THE VAMP," the new musical that opened at the Winter Garden last night, is big and brash and old-fashioned. It has Robert Alton jigs, with their usual steam and ingenuity; a platoon of beguiling dollies; an occasionally brilliant score; and the incomparable services of Carol Channing, with excellent support from David Atkinson, Bibi Osterwald, Robert Rippy, Patricia Hammerlee and, outstandingly, Matt Mattox. But it hasn't got much of a book.

The idea was obviously to kid the megaphone off old silent pictures, and there's nothing wrong with the conception, but it seemed to me they got confused somewhere along the line. What sets out to be pure farce gets occasionally side-tracked into an involved examination of the progress of the picture business, with a cumbersome love theme running through and the net result is less than hilarious.

Carol Toils

This is regrettable, because the production is brilliant and there are many stand-out numbers. Miss Channing knocks herself out from entrance to finale, but she is often fighting dim material.

She toils endlessly and to meagre avail in an enormous production number called "Samson and Delilah," but returns all alone only a few minutes later to utterly fracture the proceedings with a charming number called, "I'm Everybody's Baby." And so it goes, with the quality unsustained throughout.

One of the brightest contributions is offered consistently by Matt Mattox, a comparative newcomer, who manages to act, sing and dance incredibly well. His efforts in such numbers as "The Vamps," "Four Little Misfits" and "Ragtime Romeo" with Bibi Osterwald deserve special plaudits.

The fine hand of Mr. Alton can be discerned in such fast fandangos as "The Flickers," "Fan Club Chant" and "Delilah's Dilemma," the first act finale. David Atkinson purports himself with assurance, as the movie director, and unlimbers in good voice in "Have You Met Delilah?" and "Why Does It Have to Be You?" This latter might become popular, along with "I'm Everybody's Baby," and one or two others.

Goof in Spoof

Raoul Pene Dubois has created some extravagant and quite authentic sets representing everything from a farm in the Bronx to Grand Central Station and a Hollywood movie lot, and his costumes are equally arresting. The book is credited to John Latouche and Sam Locke and, which is so often the case, this seems to be the weak link. Mr. Latouche has also supplied the lyrics and I thought they were uniformly imaginative and intelligent. As noted above the music by James Mundy is not entirely notable.

It struck me that "The Vamp" hoped to be a sort of movie version of "Boy Friend" —a period spoof. Trouble is, there's goof in the spoof.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 11, 1955

'The Vamp' Opens At Winter Garden

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If ever a girl gave her all to make a show a hit, Carol Channing does, with the best will in the world and her fine talent, to "The Vamp."

But the big, noisy musical at the Winter Garden is like a floppy mantle thrown around her neck, out of style and charmless.

The story of silent movies, as it is told through the rise of an innocent farm girl who became a vampire, must have seemed wonderful stuff of which musicals are made.

It turns out to be a one-joke evening that batters your affections and assails your ears.

Farm Girl Star.

Making Westerns in Manhattan, an early picture company invades a farm in the Bronx for exteriors. A lonely milkmaid is inveigled into appearing briefly as a menace. Before she knows it, she is a star.

From New York to Hollywood she goes through all those familiar fan mag troubles. She loves and loses the wrong men, and is always having things put over on her.

In the end she gets the man she seemed to like the least, which is what Hollywood used to call a "cutie."

Miss Channing's first entrance is delightful, a barnyard pantomime of her daily chores, done with all the star's mock clumsiness and innocent startlement.

A little later, her first lesson in vamping is a sparkling moment, when she first realizes that the phony lure technique can be used for her private purposes.

She is delightful shooting her 40 silents a month, two at a time. And toward the end she contributes a fascinating Jekyll-Hyde song called "I'm Everybody's Baby."

The company around her are by no means duds. Bibi Osterwald stops the show with "Ragtime Romeo." Patricia Hammerlee is an incredibly poisonous, baby-talking blonde. Robert Rippy gets all the humor possible from his role as a dopey cowboy. And David Atkinson is arrogant and animated as the director.

Cold Colors.

It is hard to tell much about the songs, since the orchestra assails your ears with such volume that most of the melodies are impounded.

Raoul Pene duBois' production leans to dry, chill colors, which acutely suggest old movies, but do not warm things up for the lean humor.

Every once in a while there are real silent pictures shown, some taken of the cast, some actually old. This is a dangerous stunt, because they have a way of looking better than what is on the stage, and make "The Vamp" look aggressively unoriginal.

The dancing is bright, sharp and animated and wisely has no more to do with the overworked period before World War I than is absolutely necessary.

Daily Mirror

November 11, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Vamp,' a Musical, At Winter Garden

• Pedestrian satire of early days of movie-making lacks credibility.

A season ago John Latouche collaborated with Jerome Morross on a brilliant musical titled "The Golden Apple." Now he's teamed with Sam Locke and James Mundy to do a pedestrian song-and-dancer called "The Vamp." It produced a dull thud on the Winter Garden stage Thursday evening.

Latouche, Locke and Mundy have set out to satirize the silent flickers. The days when a farm on the outskirts of New York, a rented camera, a few feet of film and a handful of underpaid actors were all that was needed to become a movie mogul.

A VENTURESOME director, backed by a dime museum proprietor and corset-maker, invades the Bronx to make a wild and wooly Western. The stars are a simpering, curly-haired blonde and an ex-sheriff. But, through an accident, a barnyard slavey steals the scenes, and eventually becomes top vampire in what is now known as Hollywood.

The book is as corny as a square-dance shucking bee. To give you an idea, the megaphoner says: "I'm gonna metamorphosize you." To which the future siren replies: "Don't you lay a hand on me!" How far can you reach for a laugh? And the songs are hardly more inspired.

Impresarios Oscar Lerman, Martin Cohen and Alexander Carson have given the primitive proceedings the benefits of Raoul Rene Dubois' decor and supervision by the gilfted Robert Alton. Unfortunately, Alton's choreography is not off his top shelf.

Carol Channing, who was so terrific in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," makes some valiant stabs to wring fun out of a creaking vehicle. But, as the rustic Delilah, about all she can do in the way of snaring chuckles is to give out with a hillbilly accent in a piping trick voice, which she occasionally drops into baritone register.

THERE'S NO USE talking. Even a champ like Channing can't make a silk purse out of a shoat's ear. The basis of satire is credibility. And we never believed in Latouche and Locke's Delilah for a single moment.

David Atkinson struggles manfully as the resourceful director. Robert Rippy is forced to be downright sappy as an early Roy Rogers. But it is Bibi Osterwald and Matt Mattox, in subsidiary roles, who stop the show with their thrushing and hoofing. That should tip you off to what a limp lulu "The Vamp" is.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 11, 1955

THEATER

'The Vamp'

By WALTER F. KERR

SOME shows are born dull, some have dullness thrust upon them. "The Vamp," which hobble-skirted its way into the Winter Garden Thursday night, must once—long ago, in those first story conferences—have been a beautiful baby. Casting wide-eyed, bullfrog-throated Carol Channing as a slinky siren of the silver screen was clearly a captivating idea.

Unfortunately, no one seems to have had a single idea since. All the routine gestures have been made: John Latouche and Sam Looke have tacked together a libretto in which our devastating girl goes mad for a cowboy star with a horse named Old Silver Paint; Mr. Latouche and composer James Mundy have batted out a score in which carnival markers sing "Hurry, hurry!" and the star does an Arabian double-talk ditty which succeeds in mentioning Aly Khan; Raoul Pene du Bois has designed an adequate supply of mountains and movie cathedrals, and Robert Alton has dutifully driven the dancers at top-speed.

• • •

And Miss Channing has been trotted out at every turn. She is, as every one knows, a glorious zany. With long platinum braids bouncing over her shoulder and a quaver in her voice that makes every final syllable sound as though it had been played on a vibra-harp, the star plunges into the business of doing barnyard chores to a skipping rhythm, or hurling her hips at a stageful of Babylonians with rugged fortitude. She has her successes. By dropping her voice to the Winter Garden basement or pronouncing "human" as though it obviously ought to be spelled "hew-min," she teases laughs from a desert-dry script. Given even a moderately flashy number to do—"I'm Everybody's Baby" is a moderately flashy number—she is dandy.

• • •

But she has been turned, all too transparently, into a workhorse for the authors. Song after song is hurled at her—songs that might have been suitable for a second-rate ingenue, songs that make almost no use at all of her alarming talents—and she is simply ordered to bring them alive. The task is an impossible one and the procedure has a further penalty: when Bibi Osterwald, cast as a gossip columnist with a passion for 'exclusives,' is finally given a single ragtime rhythm to belt out she is able—out of her own winning slyness, and out of sheer relief—to stop the show cold. Miss Channing is valiant, but she is being victimized.

The librettists have treated their other materials with the same ingratitude. The color of the period—movie-making in New York in 1913—is ready for exploitation. And the Winter Garden teems with shotgun weddings, flickering old movies on a lowered screen, period automobiles that blow smoke puffs when cranked, bathing beauty costumes, and the spectacle of films being made two at a time.

To all of this the sponsors have brought jokes in which a wild-eyed director says "I'm going to metamorphasize you!" and his victim replies "Don't you dare lay a hand on me!"; jokes in which 'houri' is confused with a sound old English word and in which the verb 'make' is used in all the expected combinations; jokes in which a fat, breathless producer introduces a golden-curled star as "the nation's playground—I mean playmate." The silence in the theater gets spooky after a while.

• • •

Director David Alexander has wisely kept things going at a noisy clip, and the supporting company is utterly uninhibited. David Atkinson struts fiercely about in riding boots and checkered cap and sings an occasional number with authority. Dancer Matt Mattox spins vigorously and sometimes excitingly past designer DuBois' film-sprocket portals. Patricia Hammerlee plugs away at the humors of a dimpled star named Elsie Chelsea, and Will Geer waves a shotgun whenever he is expected to.

But all of Mr. Alton's pacing and Miss Channing's wiles cannot make "The Vamp" run steadily through its out-of-gear machine.

New York Post

November 11, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

Musical Tale of a Cinema Siren

Although it bursts out bravely and brightly from time to time, "The Vamp" is, in general, a great disappointment. The new musical comedy, which opened last night at the Winter Garden, had the happy idea of tracing in song and dance the astonishing career of a guileless country girl who became a triumphant cinema siren in the palmy days of the silent movies. It certainly seemed like the basis for a wonderfully satirical extravaganza, but, despite the determined efforts of a number of talented people, the result is a show that is rarely either hilarious or tuneful.

There are those incidental virtues, and I'd better mention some of them first. One, of course, is Carol Channing, who plays the title role and possesses a sharp sense of caricature. Another is the dance numbers, which have been staged by the talented Robert Alton and are invariably humorous, dynamic and exhilarating. Indeed, "The Vamp" is decidedly at its best when it forgets its attempts at verbal comedy and goes into its terpsichorean interludes. In these happy phases, things are vastly aided by the presence of a lean and agile dancer named Matt Mattox, who deserves attention.

Cinema History

What is chiefly wrong is the book, and this is all the more surprising since John Latouche had an important hand in it, and Mr. Latouche usually has a notable talent in such matters. In "The Vamp," it appears that he suffers from an embarrassment of riches. The history of the silent films offers an enormous mass of material for amiably satirical contemplation, and, among its other errors, the book tries to include virtually all of them. Instead of making for a steady stream of hilarity, this merely clutters up the evening with exposition and detail.

"The Vamp" surely makes an effort to get everything in. There are occasions when it seems that, instead of being an amused and sympathetic cartoon of a career reminiscent of that of the celebrated and legendary Theda Bara, it is intended as the musical annals of the entire motion picture industry. It is all there; the humble beginnings on 14th St., the early filmmaking in the Bronx, the exodus to Hollywood, the enormous business of manufacturing stars, and the rest of it. The only trouble is that it all grows terribly diffuse and is not often funny or pointed.

Music and Lyrics

Nor does James Mundy's music offer the needed lift to the proceedings. There are some good songs, including numbers called "Have You Met Delilah?", "Yeemy Yeemy," and "Ragtime Romeo," but, on the whole, the score struck me as pretty commonplace on first hearing. And Mr. Latouche's lyrics, although ingenious, are inclined to be, I thought, a little heavy-handed in their satire, rather in the fashion of the book. Finally, there is a waste of potentially entertaining characters, such as a pioneer lady film critic, about which too little is done.

In addition to the merits of Mr. Alton's dance direction, which always brings "The Vamp" to life resoundingly, the production has the virtue of Raoul Pene duBois' colorful sets and costumes. Miss Channing, with her sure comic skill and her ability to get the most out of a number, is of tremendous help. There is also admirable work by David Atkinson as the movie director who discovers the innocent seductress, by Robert Rippy as a fatuous cowboy star, if that isn't just another redundancy, and, in her too limited opportunities, by Bibi Osterwald as the movie critic. But "The Vamp" all too infrequently comes to satirical life.

"A Hatful of Rain"

DAILY NEWS

November 10, 1955

'A Hatful of Rain' an Impressive, Excellently Acted Social Drama

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I don't believe for an instant that Michael V. Gazzo's "A Hatful of Rain" is a great document in social drama, for quite a bit of its writing is obvious and inexpert; but I do think it is a piece of work which will jolt anybody out of whatever comfortable kind of complacence he happens to be resting in, and as an exercise in concerted acting by a group of players it is most exciting to witness. This is no play for the casual fun-seeker and therefore its life on Broadway may not be very long; but I recommend it, with its several imperfections, to those who believe that the theatre should be a place where our times can be examined and commented upon.

"A Hatful of Rain" opened last evening at the Lyceum Theatre. Its subject is addiction to narcotics. Its plot is a grim one and its conclusion is a grim one. Its actors include Shelley Winters, Ben Gazzara, Frank Silvera, Anthony Franciosa and Henry Silva, and their director is Frank Corsaro. Plot, actors and director add up to something quite extraordinary in today's theatre.

The Big Secret

The setting is a tenement on the lower East Side. Gazzara and Miss Winters are married and she is expecting a baby. He has survived some horrible experiences in the war and now he is reticent, edgy and unable to hold a job for long. He is a decent man and a loving husband, but life in this flat is all wrong because he has a secret—he is a junky.

The author, Gazzo, knows the talk of people who live ordinary lives somewhat better than he knows stage mechanics. Many of his scenes are clear-cut and vivid just because they are spoken in everyday English—not the English of a more feverish playwright who confuses obscenity with realism—but straight, believable talk. Gazzo's play is slow in starting and meandering in the middle, but it comes to an electrifying and frighteningly hopeless conclusion.

Fine Performances

Miss Winters gives a beautifully reticent performance as the wife who doesn't know what is wrong between herself and her husband until it is time for her to call the police and ask them to take him away for his own good—and his own good won't be so much, for there is yet no easy cure for drug addiction. Gazzara, who has specialized in taut and terse performances, gives an equally admirable one as the husband.

There is a fine and open job by Franciosa in the role of the addict's ever-helpful brother, and a performance by Silva in the role of a dope peddler who goes under the curious name of Mother which is quietly and magnificently chilling. All the players, indeed, have put a lot of work into "A Hatful of Rain," and the work shows. There is a skeleton set by Mordecai Gorelik which is sufficently realistic.

My own experience at the Lyceum last evening was this: I began by disliking the drama, thinking it was too obvious and too feverish, and I finished by respecting it and being more than a little shaken in mind and in emotion.

"A HATFUL OF RAIN"

Play by Michael V. Gazzo; staged by Frank Corsaro; designed by Mordecai Gorelik; presented by Jay Julien at the Lyceum Theatre, November 9, 1955. The cast:

John Pope Sr.....Frank Silvera
Johnny Pope.....Ben Gazzara
Celia Pope.....Shelley Winters
Mother.....Henry Silva
Apples.....Paul Richards
Chuch.....Harry Guardino
Polo Pope....Anthony Franciosa
Putski.....Christine White
Man.....Steve Gravers

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 10, 1955

A 'Hatful of Rain' Pleases at Lyceum

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

One only hopes last night will remain prominent on Broadway's calendar as marking the first of many plays by Michael V. Gazzo.

With the inspired assistance of Shelley Winters, and an excellent company, "A Hatful of Rain" at the Lyceum is the unforgettable first work of an extremely talented playwright.

The subject of dope addiction is risky. It is almost too flagrant and melodramatic in current real life to lend itself to dramatization.

Believable, Sympathetic.

"A Hatful of Rain" pulls no punch, of horror, tension or heroics. And it is all to Gazzo's brimful credit that the characters remain believable and sympathetic.

A young man's terrible war injuries have made him rely on dope. His wife is pregnant, and he is unable to keep jobs. His simple, devoted brother has alienated their adventurous father by giving his money in secret to the victim.

Neither the wife nor the father knows what is happening. The young husband is backed to the wall by the peddlers, and they both find out.

They also learn the more terrifying evidence of what it means to be a deprived addict.

Gazzo writes wonderful dialogue. It is subtle but telling, complex but clear.

The best illustration is a scene in the second act where father, two sons and the wife are all talking in turn, each with a different objective, each vivid, yet none really understood by the others.

It is here that Miss Winters is at her shattering best. Just told of her husband's addiction, she cannot understand or ask about it because his father has come in.

Ben Gazzara is theatrically effective in the difficult role of the husband.

Utmost Clarity.

Anthony Franciosa can play several streams of thought simultaneously with utmost clarity. His drunk scene is beautifully done, and so are the brief love scenes. His relations toward every other character are different, private and understandable.

Frank Silvera is entirely right as the father, a proud and unintentionally callous failure.

Frank Corsaro's direction keeps the pitch of the play unbelievably high without puncturing its credibility.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 10, 1955

THEATER

'A Hatful of Rain'

By WALTER F. KERR

I'LL guarantee you one thing: "A Hatfull of Rain" will shake you up as you haven't been shaken up since Jose Ferrer walked sobbing into a dim blue spotlight in "The Shrike."

The hero of the electrifying new social study at the Lyceum has a rather different problem from Mr. Ferrer's: he is a dope addict, a war veteran who once spent fourteen days and lost forty pounds in an overseas cave resisting his captors. He has picked up the habit during his hospital sojourn, "kicked it" once, then slowly given in to it all over again.

• • •

Playwright Michael V. Gazzo is willing to spare us nothing in spelling out the downward course of his gasping man, the terror by day, the nighttime "sweat," the crouching in corners and the headlong bolt into space. His detail is literal, brutal, in every way harrowing. Whether three flashy peddlers are hiking a knee into the "junkie's" stomach or an overwrought family is trying to clamp him down on a kitchen chair, the author's calculated thunderbolt has the one clear and candid intention of curdling your blood. It does.

• • •

The play is far from perfect. To get the reservations over with, let it be said that the structure of this dramatic object-lesson is as nervous and edgy and erratic as the uncontrollable knees of its hero once the stuff has run "thin." Circuitous conversations wind in and around the developing subject, odd moments lapse into jittery laughter, the shape of the piece is raw. Two decibels more and we'd be face to face with the D. T.'s scene from "Ten Nights in a Barroom."

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But there is a savage underlying sincerity in the work that brushes reservations aside. Mr. Gazzo is no mere "hoke" artist, no melodramatic opportunist. The rhythms of his language, even when they verge on the subhuman, are sharp, urban, honest in the best Actors' Studio style. The stammering vernacular is made emotionally expressive, the idiom crackles with a back-street tang. Mr. Gazzo isn't afraid of opening his mouth, even at the risk of putting his foot in it.

And he has three fiery players to back him up. In case there's been any doubt in your mind about whether movie-star Shelley Winters is a good actress, forget them. Miss Winters is wonderful. The role of Johnny Pope's wife isn't an obviously attractive one: the girl nags Johnny, nearly walks out on Johnny, spends a great deal of time clutching at straws and crying over her fate. But Miss Winters has a shrewd tongue, a stubborn jaw, a flashing sense of humor, and a flair for simple, rattled pathos that squares everything. As she scowls a "Yeah, I think it'll be all right" when Johnny's brother asks if he can put an arm around her, or as she fights back tears in a desperate effort to face up to the sudden horror in her life, she comes magically—and honorably—close to breaking your heart.

Ben Gazzara's hopelessly "hooked" veteran is a brilliant tour de force. The alarming tensions of the evening are his to elaborate, and to control. Whether he is cocking his head to one side and twisting his mouth into a sick, self-pitying smile, or diving head-first onto a bed in his anguish, the control is there. The spine-tingling eruptions are violently credible; the ordinary man behind them is credible, too.

• • •

Anthony Franciosa, as a long-time patsy who loves both his brother and his brother's wife, rounds out the battling trio. From the time that he enters—a roistering, oddly stiff-legged drunk—to the time that he crams a handkerchief into his brother's mouth and plunges into the searing truth-telling of the climax, Mr. Franciosa is a clear, complex, badly battered human being. There are, in addition, excellent performances from Frank Silvera as a demanding, thick-skulled father; Henry Silva as an impeccably turned-out hoodlum; Paul Richards as a giggling dope-pusher; and Christine White as a pasty-faced blonde with a mysterious place in Connecticut. Director Frank Corsaro has carved out some passages of sadistic brutality with switchblade precision, and Mordecai Gorelik's shabby East Side apartment—with dingy fire-escapes rising to the heavens—is gloomily evocative.

"A Hatful of Rain" is a first play, and there are times when it shows it. But it spits fire on the Lyceum stage.

New York Post

November 10, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Misfortunes of a Dope Addict

It might be doing a cruel injustice to Michael V. Gazzo to say that "A Hatful of Rain" is more concerned with sensationalism than with being a serious social study of the ravages of the narcotics habit. So I won't say it. But I will state that Mr. Gazzo's play, which opened last night at the Lyceum Theater, is considerably less interesting when it is contemplating the tragedy inflicted on a family by the terrible addiction of one of its members than it is when it shoots the works in presenting a graphic account of the sinister activities of the dope peddlers.

Indeed, despite its deadly earnest intentions, it is not possible to express much admiration for "A Hatful of Rain," even as a frank melodrama. When it goes into its consideration of the melancholy plight of the Pope family, resulting from the ineffectual efforts of one son to conceal the fact that his brother is a narcotics victim from his father and his sister-in-law, Mr. Gazzo's play gets into a lot of trouble. It no doubt has an important point to make about the mistaken attempt of the son to protect his unfortunate brother, but it is fairly clumsy about it.

Here is where a curiously ironic aspect of the melodrama emerges. Unquestionably, the playwright is both upset and indignant about the illicit dope trade and warmly sympathetic toward the hapless victim and his luckless family But, where the narrative is uncertain, clumsy and sometimes downright dull when it is dealing with its good or, at least, well-meaning people, it comes to life shockingly but entertainingly as soon as it turns to its group of monstrous villains. They are, I hate to say, oddly and perversely interesting monsters.

There is, for example, the leader of the gang, a fellow who hides behind dark glasses, is given to reading while he waits for his prey, and goes by the name of Mother. Then there is his toady, a young man known as Apples, who has a child mind, feminine instincts, and reaches for his knife when crossed by his pals. Or, to take the third of the gang, there is Chuch, who sometimes sympathizes with his victims while he is throttling them. Finally, there is the girl known as Putski, who dresses and behaves provocatively but doesn't want to be touched by men. A trait they curiously possess in common is that they have Southern accents.

There is a scene in the third act when the junky set, waiting around the apartment of poor Johnny Pope, indulges in a kind of dope-ridden squabble. I must admit that I found this much more dramatic than the agonies of the tortured Johnny, the sorrows of the victim's pregnant wife, the bewilderments of the brother who loves both Johnny and Johnny's wife, and the misunderstanding of the ineffectual father. The family episodes are the core of Mr. Gazzo's play, but it is the peripheral sections dealing with the monsters that hold the attention.

All of the performances seemed to me excellent. It is not surprising that Ben Gazzara, who specializes in playing agonized young men, is quite brilliant as Johnny, or that Anthony Franciosa and Frank Silvera should be fine as the brother and father. But I was astonished to find Shelley Winters giving an honest and believable portrait of the luckless wife. The three main villains are picturesquely portrayed by Henry Silva as Mother, Paul Richards as Apples, and Harry Guardino as Chuch. "A Hatful of Rain" isn't impressive as serious drama but those dope peddlers are fun.

Journal American

November 10, 1955

Ben Gazzara Outstanding

Scores in Role as Dope Addict; Shelley Winters Shares in Praise

By JOHN McCLAIN

SEVERAL CONCLUSIONS SEEM to emerge from "A Hatful of Rain," a new play by Michael V. Gazzo which was presented at the Lyceum Theatre last night. One is that Ben Gazzara, who left the cast of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" to take the male lead will certainly enhance his prestige, if not his bankroll; another is that Shelley Winters, who shares billing with him, will confound many people who regarded her as a rather trivial Hollywood actress; the last and least agreeable fact is that this tortured examination of dope addiction does not sustain itself as an evening in the theatre.

Perhaps we have all become too familiar with the usual pattern of the narcotics problem: books have been written by the dozen, daily newspapers serialize the agonies of habitual users, speeches are made for reform every few days in various legislatures.

Some Deficiency

And so, when we are given a seat at a peephole and permitted to look into the home of an addict, we are stirred with a certain revulsion. This is the same story we've read or heard about a hundred times, and before we've seen much we have a feeling that it's here and it's horrible, but must we go to the theatre to live with it?

There is the added deficiency that there is no corollary situation of any importance. Sure, the addict is a nice kid, he got the habit because of long confinement in pain in an Army hospital; but we are never made to feel strenuously that what happens to him or any of the people around him is monumental.

"The Shrike," a treatise on the matter of mental cases, revealed a staggering deficiency in society's approach to the problem. No such depths are probed here; I believe a more moving drama could be written about what happens to the junkie after he is committed.

Titanic Job

This is all said without regard to a titanic performance by Ben Gazzara, who brings the sufferings of the addict onto the stage and wrings the last drop from his agonizing portrayal; Shelley Winters, as his wife, gives a moving and consistently believable interpretation of the tragedy of one who unknowingly lives in the shadow of this blight.

Other forceful contributions are offered by Frank Silvera as the boy's father; Anthony Franciosa, as his brother; Henry Silva, Paul Richards, Harry Guardino and Christine White.

"A Hatful of Rain" is an incisive exploration of one of our major problems, but I'm afraid there are too few people who go to the theatre for serious and close examination of pathology to keep this one with us long.

Daily Mirror

November 10, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'A Hatful of Rain' Drizzles at Lyceum

• Depressing drama of dope addict's plight stars Ben Gazzara, Shelley Winters.

The play by Michael V. Gazzo, which Jay Julien brought to the Lyceum Theatre Wednesday evening, is titled "A Hatful of Rain." Its moral, we think, is that some people seek awfully hard to do something good in life, only to end up with plenty of aqua in the chapeaux.

The drama revolves around a father who has been so busy trying to strike it rich that his two sons have been left to shift for themselves. The apple of his eye, whose marriage is rapidly going on the rocks, is a dope addict. The less favored boy does his best to help his brother, only to have his motives challenged.

IN THE END, the addict confesses to his wife and father, and determines to break himself of the habit. The wife realizes that he cannot do it alone, and persuades him to surrender to the police and take a cure.

Frankly, we don't think that, for all its good intentions, the new arrival adds anything toward a solution of a problem which this nation should resolutely face.

It is episodic and choppily written. Neither the action nor the dialogue flows as smoothly or effectively as it should. The characters are, in themselves, interesting, though most of them are pretty mixed up. The more fascinating, we thought, were the subsidiary figures, ruthless, cruel "pushers." They knew what they were about.

FRANK CORSARO'S direction fails to tighten and give the necessary drive to a rambling script. Several of the episodes, in our opinion, were too slowly paced. The principals should have responded to their cues more quickly. Instead, they left considerable dead air around the properly drab setting by Mordecai Gorelik.

Ben Gazzara, who was outstanding in "End as a Man" and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," brings earnestness to the role of the tortured victim. Anthony Franciosa is more successful as the misguided brother. Frank Silvera couldn't put much life into the obtuse, selfish and demanding father.

Shelley Winters, a film queen, heroically tosses aside glamor to become an unattractive and dissatisfied wife. She has one particularly amusing scene in which she describes Utopia in a modern office, only to conclude that it is the devil of a dull place.

HENRY SILVA, Paul Richards, Harry Guardino, Steve Gravers and Christine White are arresting as the reptilian peddlers and their dumb moll. It is like watching a bunch of nasty snakes crawling about the premises.

It took courage for such a gifted young actor as Gazzara to leave what might have been a lengthy career in a hot hit like "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" to gamble on "A Hatful of Rain." Which, we regret to say, may provide him with just that. For the Lyceum's new tenant is too sprawling and depressing to spell either success d'estime or box-office.

The New York Times

November 10, 1955

The Theatre: A Play of Substance

'A Hatful of Rain' Is Offered at Lyceum

By BROOKS ATKINSON

ALL the actors give wonderful performances in "A Hatful of Rain," which opened at the Lyceum last evening. Shelley Winters, Ben Gazzara, Anthony Franciosa, all the others are at the top of their form.

For they are appearing in a play of substance. "A Hatful of Rain" is the story of a decent young man who is nevertheless a dope addict. Michael V. Gazzo's terse drama tells some horrifying truths candidly. Under Frank Corsaro's direction, the actors match his candor with honesty and skill. Although the subject is shocking, the stage work is admirable.

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Set on New York's Lower East Side, "A Hatful of Rain" tells the story of a dope addict from the points of view of both his family and himself. Johnny Pope's wife cannot understand what has happened to their life. He is forever mysteriously disappearing. There are secrets in his life.

Meanwhile, Johnny is at his wit's end to get the dope twice a day when he needs it. He is also desperately trying to keep his wife and his father from knowing what has happened to him. In a sense, "A Hatful of Rain" is the story of how Johnny is forced to tell his wife his degrading and terrifying secret.

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A reticent writer who dislikes attacking his subject head-on, Mr. Gazzo has some difficulty with his narrative. "A Hatful of Rain" is more like a worksheet for actors than a fully resolved play. It postpones the big subject until the second act. It slips off into side issues every now and then. It does not really succeed in explaining the relationship between Johnny's father and his two sons. Nor does it explain how a decent young man like Johnny got involved in buying dope from gangsters.

Shelley Winters and Ben Gazzara Star

But Mr. Gazzo's attitude toward his subject raises the drama above sensationalism. And there is no resisting the pathos and terror of his most illuminating scenes. The homely scenes between Johnny and his wife, both before and after he has told her his secret, are simple and moving. The scenes between Johnny and the gangsters are vivid. And the scenes in which Johnny has to face the agony of doing without dope are overwhelming. Mr. Gazzo does not moralize. "A Hatful of Rain" is a good case history told in human terms.

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Mordecai Gorelik has set it in a baleful tenement that is sparingly decorated with some of the comforts of living. Fortunately for the author, the actors are superb. There is not a facile stroke anywhere in the performance. As the bewildered wife, Miss Winters could hardly do better. She is simple, aware of all that is going on around her, good-humored and full of compassion and decision when the last scene comes around. She has the taste as well as the craft for a lucid and disarming character portrait.

Poor Mr. Gazzara is never left off anything. Having just escaped dipsomania if nothing worse in "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof," he is now wrangling with another uncongenial father and struggling with another vice. He is strong enough as an actor to acquit himself admirably again. It is a manly performance, moody but free of whining; and some of his scenes are almost unbearably powerful.

As the loyal brother, Anthony Franciosa is kindly, humorous, informal and courageous in the emergencies. Frank Silvera plays the part of the obtuse father with likeable innocence. There is a particularly sinister gangster by Henry Silva, and an amusing gangster's satellite by Paul Richards.

"A Hatful of Rain" is neither perfect nor pleasant. But the honesty of the writing and the acting gives it distinction. It is a forthright statement of things that are horrifying and true.

"Arlequin Poli Par L'Amour" & "Le Barbier de Seville"

New York Post

November 9, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Comedie Francaise Wins Again

The illustrious Comedie Francaise continued its triumphant engagement at the Broadway Theater last night by offering as its second program a dual bill consisting of Beaumarchais' "Le Barbier de Seville" and Marivaux' "Arlequin Poli Par l'Amour." The two 18th-century comedies, with their differing styles, the one broad, satirical and mocking, the other all grace, lightness and gay artificiality, demonstrated once more the brilliance of one of the world's great acting companies and the value of a long artistic tradition when it remains fresh and vital.

There has been so much enthusiastic and entirely justified critical applause for the historic French troupe in its first American appearance that it may not be out of place to say a few kind words for New York audiences for a change. It seems clear that the admiration and interest bestowed on the Comedie Francaise is not the result of any snob appeal but is based on genuine appreciation of notable theatrical work, and the fact that what we have cheered is not easy popular theater but French classics done in the original tongue is, I think, to our credit.

The Slapstick

This, however, is not to say that the offerings presented by the visitors are lacking in the virtues of sheer entertainment. The French company is not awed by its own classics and isn't afraid to be hilarious in the best slapstick tradition when that is the mood demanded by the occasion. You can enjoy these performances even when your talent for the Gallic language is as wistful and weak as mine. For example, there is a scene in "Le Barbier de Seville" which merely consists of the appearance of two low comedy servants, one sneezing, the other falling asleep, and the result is hilarity that is truly international.

The opening item on the current bill is the Marivaux comedy, a bright and charming little pastoral that is almost half ballet. With its airiness, its grace and its artful pseudo-simplicity, it is entirely delightful, and its incidental music, which has been newly composed by Andre Cadou, who leads the orchestra, is charming. Not the least of the comedy's artistic virtues is the presence in the role of the tale's wicked fairy of Marie Sabouret, a very beautiful actress.

The Barber

The longer item is the celebrated Beaumarchais comedy, which most of us know better as an opera. It is good to see it in its original form, and I only wish I could follow its dialogue in far more detail than I can. For Beaumarchais, who, you should recall, was an early supporter of the American Revolution, was regarded as a very dangerous fellow in his day, with his hatred of tyranny and oppression, his advanced beliefs in the rights of man, and his satirical scorn for the evils of his time. And Figaro, of course, was by way of being a premature democratic hero.

In its chief roles, you will find Jean Piat as the wily Figaro, Jacques Toja as the romantic count, Micheline Boudet as the sly heroine and Louis Seigner, the superb M. Jourdain of "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme," as the baffled guardian. Then there are the comic roles of the absurd servants and the disreputable music teacher, which are played with comic zest by Georges Chamarat, Teddy Bilis and Jean Meyer. And I advise you to watch the already-mentioned M. Cadou, who leads the orchestra as if he'd been doing it since the days of Moliere. The Comedie Francaise is living up to its reputation.

"ARLEQUIN POLI PAR L'AMOUR"

Comedy by Marivaux; staged by Gaston Baty and Jacques Charon; settings by Emile Bertin; incidental music by Andre Cadou; performed together with "Le Barbier de Seville" by the Comedie Francaise under the auspices of S. Hurok at the Broadway Theatre, November 8, 1955. The cast:

Harlequin.....Jacques Charon
Trivelin.....Jean Piat
The Shepherd..Jean Louis Jemma
Dancing Master....Jacques Toja
Silvia.....Micheline Boudet
The Fairy.....Marie Sabouret
The Singer...Arsene Drancourt

"LE BARBIER DE SEVILLE"

Comedy by Beaumarchais; settings by Suzanne Lalique; incidental music by Louis Beydts. The cast:

Bazile.....Jean Meyer
Barthole.....Louis Seigner
La Jeunesse...Georges Chamarat
Figaro.....Jean Piat
L'Eveille.....Teddy Bilis
A Notary.....Michel Galabru
Count Almaviva...Jacques Toja
Rosine.....Micheline Boudet
An Officer.....Arsene Drancourt

New York Herald Tribune

November 9, 1955

THEATER

Comedie Francaise

By WALTER F. KERR

YOU can buy a French-English libretto in the lobby of the Broadway if you want to, but you're not going to need it for the first half of the Comedie Francaise's new double-bill. A light, deft, powder-box conceit from the featherweight pen of Marivaux—"Love Teaches Harlequin" it's called—has been given such animated gayety that it spells out its own simple story with a kick of the heels and an irrespressible bounce into space.

Harlequin, it seems, has been sleeping his life away until a very much engaged but very thoroughly bored fairy princess falls in love with him. Awakened, Harlequin turns out to be a bit of a lout, decidedly unresponsive to romantic invitation. He must be taught to love, and he is; and the games he learns carry him distressingly far afield from the lass who has educated him.

The mood is both wise and fragile—as fragile as the great gauze fans that shield the princess' face or the gray-and-silver garden in which the disenchantment takes place—and it is perfectly sustained by a company that knows how to approach the preposterous with an innocent sobriety. Jaques Charon is Harlequin, a diamond-clad clod who merely bleats when confronted with beauty and who sits out his boredom at the fair lady's throne by carefully studying his scissor-like feet. M. Charon enters in a clock-work daze, observes the elegant deportment of his mentors and imitates it with marionette precision, teeters slowly back and forth as a brand new emotion dazzles him—and conjures into being a superb combination of the traditional fool and the dawning human being.

But every one who has strayed into this lacquered wonderland is filled with a simple conviction that wonderlands exist. Marie Sabouret's regal fairy with a walking-stick wand is a delectably wry and winning vision. Micheline Boudet's shepherdess—the object of Harlequin's alienated affections—is sunny and suitably tempting, and Jean Piat's conniving servant is as sleek and bubbling as the effortless little narrative he keeps bustling along.

M. Piat really asserts himself, though, in the evening's second romantic adventure, Beaumarchais' lively and impudent "Barber of Seville." The members of the Comedie shuttle from fat parts to thin ones—and back again—with professional grace and unflagging enthusiasm. This time the actor draws Figaro. As he sweeps onto the stage with an easy bravado and an ear-to-ear smirk, you sense that the role represents for him the distillation of all the outrageous rogues, flamboyant ne'er-do-wells, and captivating scoundrels that fiction has ever put its mind to. And as he drops a guitar from his shoulder to compose a scurrilous tune, dodges around street-corners to help a friend abduct a maid, or puts a finger to his nose in bright-red astonishment, you see that he is drawing from the role—in infinite and robust detail—the very essence of that comedy-servant who is really the world's master. The performance is a burst of contagious energy, a blaze of story-book color.

The amorous merry-go-round that Beaumarchais concocted in order to say a few pertinent things about the relationship of the upper and lower classes is further kept spinning by Micheline Boudet, as an imprisoned lass who plies her needle and dreams of a mysterious lover; Louis Seigner, as a scowling guardian surrounded by an orchestra of yawning and sneezing attendants; Jacques Toja, as a well born suitor with a taste for disguises; and Jean Meyer, as an understandably bewildered music-teacher. All are in excellent form, and the pastel street of houses that designer Suzanne Lalique has supplied by way of background is stunning.

The Comedie seems even happier with Marivaux than with its giant, Moliere.

Daily Mirror

November 9, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

Comedie Francaise Scores High Again

• 'Love Teaches Harlequin' and 'The Barber of Seville' wowed the first-nighters.

The Comedie Francaise presented Marivaux' "Love Teaches Harlequin" and Beaumarchais' "The Barber of Seville" at the Broadway Theatre Tuesday evening.

The works not only complement each other, but also have an importance to history. In fact, they made history.

Both authors were revolutionists in their way. Marivaux brought in the play of sentiment, grace and wit, as a protest against didactic writing and the rigid classic standards. Though he has achieved a stature inferior to Corneille, Racine or Moliere, he has become a vastly popular playwright.

"LOVE TEACHES HARLEQUIN" is a delightful pastoral, charmingly humorous. It has to do with a Fairy who uses her magical powers to ensnare Harlequin. Though not overly bright, he is smart enough to learn the secret of her spell and use it to gain happiness with a shepherdess, Silvia.

This kind of divertissement, at once playlet and ballet, demands impeccable style. And this it receives at the hands of the distinguished visitors from France. Jacques Charon has all the skill required to bring to life the bumptious, reluctant lover, who ends by making his captor a captive.

Micheline Boudet is captivating as the shepherdess of his choice, while Marie Sabouret is lovely as the Fairy Queen who falls victim to her own wiles.

THE DECOR by Emile Bertin and the incidental music by Andre Cadou are assets, as is the tasteful direction by Gaston Baty and Jacques Charon.

It was Beaumarchais' "Barber of Seville" and "The Marriage of Figaro" that did much to bring on the French Revolution. All he wanted was a constitutional monarchy that would give men of talent, though not of the nobility, scope for their gifts. Instead, his impudent wit was a notable factor in changing the course of French government.

Both "Barber" and "Marriage" became excellent operas. But their creator was so unfortunate as to die before receiving royalties from them. Beaumarchais also made extremely generous contributions to the American colonies, and never got back any of his investment in liberty.

THOUGH THE program gives no credit to the stager, we bow from the waist to the anonymous one.

Louis Seigner, a comedian of first rank, is quite wonderful as the elderly Bartholo who would wed his young ward. Jean Piat is magnificent as the clever Figaro. Micheline Boudet is enchanting as the ward who helps to outwit her guardian. And Jacques Toja is good as the Count Almaviva who finally wins the fair heroine.

Journal-American

November 9, 1955

Fine Quality Maintained

Famed Paris Players Present 2 Offerings in Delightful Style

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE CURRENT AND RENOWNED Comedie Francaise company which has enjoyed exceptional business in the big Broadway Theatre with their initial effort, "Bourgois Gentilhomme," last night presented the second in their repertory series. This was a twin bill offering Marivaux' "Arlequin Poli Par L'Amour" (translated as "Love Teaches Harlequin") and Beaumarchais' "Le Barbier de Seville" (not translated, but if you need any help I'll——).

The grace and deportment of the company, the arrestingly tasteful stage setting and the delightful music incidental to both traditional comedies supports the high standard already established by the visitors and recommends the evening not only to bi-lingual theatregoers, but to all who have an interest in the mannered hilarity of French 18th Century dramatists.

This is said in all conscience by one who makes no pretense of understanding more than two jokes in ten of the perfectly-enunciated, rapid, but by no means dated or hopelessly complicated French.

Ageless Problem

By a curious coincidence "l'amour" plays a rather large part in both frolics. In the Harlequin bit we are presented with the rather ageless problem of an ingenuous young man who is pursued, captured and taught the finesse of love by an experienced lady, only to have him bring his new knowledge to bear on the tender young flower of his own choosing.

"The Barber," whose plot you must have endeavored to follow at the opera, is much the same situation in reverse in that here an aging man is hot on the trail of a young lady. The means by which he fails is much too familiar and involved to bear re-telling here, but once again true love conquers all

The Francaise people, who have been in the business for 275 years with a repertory of 2,559 plays, bring an authority to the proceedings matched only by, probably, the D'Oyly Cartes, of London.

They have done these comedies endless times, they have the advantage of having been on the road for more than two centuries before trying Broadway. They certainly know their lines, they know how the lines should be read, they know where the laughs come; they have solved the problems of scenery and direction and music. The only imponderable remaining would seem to be whether or not there is a large enough audience to reward them in New York. And this question appears to have been rather happily answered.

Professional Note

All the performers are first rate, but in the first episode I was impressed by Marie Sabouret, Micheline Boudet, Jacques Charon and Jean Piat. Most of these same appeared in the second effort, but they were joined by Louis Seigner who was, as always, extremely comic.

Emile Bertin deserves a special nod for the set of "Harlequin," as does Andre Cadou for the score and his musical direction for the entire production.

One note of true professionalism intruded itself into the evening. Two fauns, who spend all of "Harlequin" standing on either sides of the stage and engaging occasionally in satirical dances to allow passage of time, somehow brushed against one another and one lost his complicated head piece. In a flash the other had somehow whipped his off and out of sight, so that when they resumed their places his partner was less conspicuous.

This impressed everybody as great showmanship, and I think they ought to keep it in the act. Or has it been there all along?

DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

November 9, 1955

Two 'New' Comedies in French

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The distinguished company from the Comedie Francaise changed its bill at the Broadway Theatre last evening and offered a stylish pair of comedies, Marivaux' "Arlequin Poli par l'Amour" and Beaumarchais' "Le Barbier de Seville." In them Micheline Boudet revealed herself as a most artful and piquante little lady.

The Marivaux one-acter is an Eighteenth Century "Iolanthe," concerning a wicked fairy (Marie Sabouret) who falls in love with an oaf who is so stupid he ignores her and falls in love instead with a pretty shepherdess (Mlle. Boudet). Jean Louis Jemma is most amusing as the oaf. It is a nice little fantasy—or perhaps cute is the adjective—and there is some appropriately pleasant music by Andre Cadou, who also conducts the orchestra at the Broadway.

A Spicy Comedy

"The Barber of Seville" is, of course, an affair of considerable spice and substance. As I sat watching this admirable company of players last evening, I began wishing for the impossible—wishing that the comedy could be played just as it was being played, which was brilliantly and attractively, but with all the gay Rossini music from the opera version with it. An impossibility, of course . . . but there's no harm in wishing.

The lady and gentlemen from the Comedie Francaise respect tradition but they do not let it awe them. Their playing of "The Barber" is swift, alert and skimming. Jean Piat's Figaro is a fellow whose cunning is exceeded only by his charm, and Jacques Toja, who has more teeth than Liberace, is a most elegant and amorous Count Almaviva.

Low Comedy, Too

Louis Seigner, who seems to be the mainstay of the French visitors, gives a solidly grumpy performance in the role of Dr. Bartholo, and Jean Meyer is an amusingly crafty Bazile (or Don Basilio, as they call him in the opera). There is a nice low-comedy interlude by Georges Chamarat and Teddy Bilis as an ancient pair of servants who seem to be patterned after two of Walt Disney's dwarfs, Sneezy and Dopey.

But last evening was, for me, Mlle. Boudet's. She is a coquette to whom I doff my hat . . . if that is the proper way to approach a coquette.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

November 9, 1955

Gay Evening By Comedie Francaise

By SAUL LEVINSON.

One language is as good as another even when watching a French play with an English ear and an American eye. The saving grace, of course, is the American eye which enjoys a full range of classic, comic pleasures afforded by the Comedie Francaise, now at the Broadway Theater.

Two comedies were on the bill last night. "Love Teaches Harlequin," by Marivaux, begins the laughter. "The Barber of Seville," by Beaumarchais, continues it.

Both stories use material so well pressed into literary history as to be easily followed after a quick, previous glance at the program notes. Their enactment is fulfilled to a degree beyond much doubt of perfection. And more, the feeling prevails that this is likely the only troupe that could have brought the pair off with a result of current theater excitement.

Tale of Harlequin.

The one-acter that began the evening tells of Harlequin, the youth carried off by a fairy in hope that he will love her. Love, indeed, conquers all, but not until Harlequin outwits his abductor and wins his way clear to marry a shepherdess who has caught his fancy.

The simplicity of the tale suggests a balletic approach so strongly that it would be difficult to remain content with a formal reading. Happily, this has been anticipated and there are light dances spotted throughout.

Figaro to the Rescue.

"The Barber of Seville" is a different matter. It is made of sturdier comic stuff and goes about its four acts in a spirit of full-forced gaiety. Here is found the lovely Rosine in danger of marrying her elderly guardian instead of the famous count she loves. And perhaps it would come to pass this way, of course, except for the rascally Figaro who has saved so many an operatic day and here saves a prose-filled evening.

The style is in the grand manner, making complete use of the plot's shenanigans. We would say even more fine things of this production, but we simply haven't the Gaul to do so.

The New York Times

November 9, 1955

Theatre: French Bill

Visitors Do 'Barber of Seville,' Harlequinade

By HERBERT L. MATTHEWS

THOSE to whom "The Barber of Seville" is a gay opera by Rossini now have the rarest of chances to see it as a play, superbly performed in French by the visiting Comédie Française. "The Barber" is generally considered the masterpiece of eighteenth-century French comedy (the date is 1775). It is a type with a touch of licentiousness, a sort of sensual frivolity that keeps a solid basis of honesty.

Beaumarchais, who wrote it, lives today because he probed deeply. The story and the moral are summed up by Figaro, the most famous of barbers, in the very last words of the play: "When youth and love are in league to deceive an old man, everything he does to stop them can well be called 'The Useless Precaution.'"

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The old guardian, Bartholo, is played by Louis Seigner, who repeats his triumph as M. Jourdain in "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme." Bartholo is drawn in depth; he is no caricature, however ridiculous he has to be, and M. Seigner depicts him as a man eaten by his jealousies and meannesses, but a man who suffers. Rosine, the minx who deceives him, is one of the most charming parts in the French theatre and Micheline Boudet plays it for all it is worth.

The evening began with the earlier (1720) one-act costume play by Marivaux, "Love Teaches Harlequin." It is a fairy tale, a poetic trifle, as light as a soufflé and as pleasant a dish to begin an evening's feast. Only the French and only the Comédie Française could make us delight in anything so gossamer. The title tells the whole plot. It is a harlequinade, a comedy shot through with the tortures of love and the subtle melancholy that Marivaux made so fashionable.

The acting is a tour de force of the first order, and again Mlle. Boudet is the delightful heroine, with the nimble, amusing Jacques Charon as the shepherd whom love polishes.

As with Molière's comedy that the company just gave, one can only throw bouquets in all directions for in the Comédie Française all the players are stars. The scenery, the costumes, the music, the dancing, the direction, all cry out for praise.

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A few more names must be mentioned—Jean Meyer hitting a high spot of the evening with Bazile's famous speech on calumny, Jean Piat as Figaro, Jacques Toja as Count Almaviva. They and all the others contributed mightily to one of the most charming evenings that the theatre has given New York in many a long year.

"The Heavenly Twins"

The New York Times

November 5, 1955

Theatre: Sin Made Dull

'The Heavenly Twins' Opens Eye at Booth

By BROOKS ATKINSON

IN "The Heavenly Twins," which opened one eye at the Booth last evening, Faye Emerson plays a Frenchwoman who shoots her husband for infidelity.

This is obviously one step forward in social relations, even though the author takes it back in the last scene. But it is to be feared that the author has nothing to offer except the homicidal idea. "The Heavenly Twins" has been adapted into English from the French of Albert Husson, a Parisian writer noted for making sin irresistible.

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Perhaps sin is resistible in New York, although one would not have thought so. Or perhaps the English adaptation has lost the French savor. Since the adaptor has removed his name from the program, his prudence will be honored in these forebearing columns, things being tough all over. For there is no use pussy-footing around the obvious factor. "The Heavenly Twins" is profoundly dull. Only Noel Coward, collaborating with Molière and Shaw, could shake a snicker out of it.

Although the lady shoots her husband, apparently she does not kill him. Since she shoots blank cartridges the first time, one understands why he persists in living. But to all appearances she succeeds the second time. Three shots and he collapses on the floor. Whereupon "The Heavenly Twins" picks its way through a languorous legend that involves an attempted infidelity between the lady and her husband's illegitimate son. But in the last scene the husband reappears, impenitent, smiling and full of the old moxie. He never did die, really. The main body of the play turns out to have been only a bad dream.

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As a matter of fact, one would have realized that even without the last scene. For there is nothing much more numbing than unsuccessful attempts to portray wickedness in a gay manner. They are like the senile roués who inhabit old-fashioned musical comedies.

Even the actors are smothered by "The Heavenly Twins." Cyril Ritchard's direction has not saved them. As the lethal lady Miss Emerson looks pretty gorgeous in Helene Pons' costumes that affect the open shoulder. But Miss Emerson does not have enough vivacity as an actress to make the dialogue or situations sparkle.

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Jean Pierre Aumont, who seems to have convalesced from the injuries he contracted in "My Name Is Aquilon" several seasons ago, plays two parts in the current frolic—the dissolute husband, the dissolute son. He is still in good humor, and may have a good part some day. Lucille Patton, an attractive blonde with an amusing voice, acts the enigmatic part of a bewildered young wife, and Drew Thompson tries his best to make something funny out of the paradoxical part of an amorous though virtuous lawyer.

This column feels most grateful to Marcel Hillaire, who plays a Gallic Beelzebub. M. Hillaire cheerfully portrays the pleasures of damnation. He succeeds better than the author. He seems to be getting some fun out of "The Heavenly Twins."

"THE HEAVENLY TWINS"

Comedy adapted from the French by Albert Husson; staged by Cyril Ritchard; costumes by Helene Pons; scenery and lighting by Eldon Elder; produced by the Theatre Guild at the Booth Theatre, November 4, 1955.

The cast:

Lucile Miremont..Faye Emerson
Henri.....Jean Pierre Aumont
Police Inspector Mourel.....
Earl Montgomery
The Old Man....Marcel Hillaire
Marie.....Lucille Patton
Philippe Ploquin..Drew Thompson
Nicole Belcourt....Gaby Rodgers
Pierre Belcourt.....
Jean Pierre Aumont

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

November 5, 1955

THEATER

'The Heavenly Twins'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE are cadavers all over the place at the Booth. With the rat-a-tat-tat of a handy little pistol, the curtain goes up to disclose Faye Emerson, swathed in white satin, standing over the body of her not very late husband. Corpse number two is, if I remember correctly, the same husband — miraculously resuscitated but dropped all over again in his resusitated tracks. Corpse number three is a Parisian lawyer with a light judicial beard, an old-fashioned mother, and a taste for Palestrina. (He has simply bored Miss Emerson, and we know what a crack shot she is). Corpse number four, stiffest of them all, is the play.

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For reasons which never become obvious during the long, silent course of a singularly unmerry evening, the Theater Guild has made arrangements to have "The Heavenly Twins," a French farce by Albert Husson, translated into respectable English. The translator and adapter, identified until a week or so ago, has—presumably after a good bit of unofficial and apparently utterly unhelpful rewriting in Boston—removed his name from the proceedings. Other people have left theirs on, though, so I suppose we'll have to talk about them.

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To begin with M. Husson, these are some of the jovial developments he has bequeathed his stunned associates: a housemaid who opens the morning mail and censors it; an invisible corpse that must be stepped over by the solid body that has formerly inhabited it (following, now?); an equally invisible old fellow in a visible muffler and a visible cap who perches all over the furniture and talks about the 'other world'; a dead ringer for the first dead (?) man who strolls into the living-room with his thumbs hooked cheerfully in his trouser pockets.

Then there is this clock. It is a grandfather clock, standing solemnly against the rear wall of the Miremont apartment in Paris. It becomes, with the lowering of some lights and the setting off of one of those standard smoke puffs, the reincarnated soul of Miss Emerson's despatched husband. From time to time as the evening's amorous adventures dawdle along and Miss Emerson manages to share a couch with one or another of her ardent adirers, the clock is heard to grunt, strike, whirr, rattle its pendlum, and—unlike the audience—laugh.

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Since nothing is impossible, there is always the off chance that M. Husson's mysterious improvisation may under certain more stylish circumstances have seemed the sleek, brittle, callous, knowing, and impudent conceit it is so desperately trying to be. Jean Pierre Aumont appears to have originated the dual role he is now playing when the piece first delighted its Parisian customers, and at odd and unpredictable moments he does throw a little light on the evening's intentions.

Once he has become his own double—I warn you, we're never going to get this plot straightened out—M. Aumont swaggers with agreeable conviction, whisks people in and out of the room with the flick of a high-comedy finger, and makes quite an attractive little set-piece out of the business of pacing the room between wife and mistress without being able to think of a word to say to either of them. (The words he is finally given to say are "Tennis, any one?", which should give you the general idea.)

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M. Aumont is, I firmly believe, a very good actor. He is not, however, surrounded by congenial spirits. Faye Emerson is uninterruptedly handsome as the cool killer with a romantic soul, she is stunning in grey, in peach, and in the seven other colors Helen Pons has pinned to her back, and in a few pantomime moments she gives evidence of knowing just what degree of sophistication is expected of her. When, for instance, she casts an idle and splendily unconcerned glance at her husband's inert form during a casual telephone call, the tone of the play is more or less intact. When Miss Emerson speaks, though, the crisp and epigrammatic structure turns to jello: the voice is soft and husky, the readings are realistic, the manner is matter-of-fact. The conceits of tongue-in-cheek fantasy are not this dish's dish.

Though the normally impeccable Cyril Ritchard has directed, the other playing is curiously routine—when it is not laboriously digging you in the ribs to see if you are still there. "The Heavenly Twins" is lamentably earthbound.

Daily Mirror

November 5, 1955

Robert Coleman's THEATRE:

'Heavenly Twins' Opens at the Booth

• Gaby Rodgers excellent, setting and costumes handsome in new offering by Albert Husson.

Albert Husson has been represented in New York by a product that is declining in quality. It reached its lowest ebb at the Booth Theatre Friday evening. It seemed almost incredible that the man who had given us the delightful "My Three Angels," and the sexy "Little Hut," could have turned out so feeble a fable as "The Heavenly Twins."

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THE NEW HUSSON work strives to be daring, and ends up just being plain dull. It has to do with a jealous Parisian wife who attempts to kill her philandering husband. She fails because the smart fellow has replaced the lethal cartridges in her pistol with blanks. Then follows a fantastic farce within a farce.

The husband who wasn't killed becomes a prankish grandfather's clock. His spouse discovers in same the picture of his illegitimate son, with whom she tries to have an affair. But her stepchild has a wife, who keeps getting in the way. Enough of this. And enough is much too much.

The Theare Guild has bought a handsome setting by Eldon Elder and excellent costumes by Helene Pons. But they only succeed in lending eye appeal to a dreary and tasteless tenant. And there's the case of Cyril Ritchard, an actor-director of wit, whose staging hasn't been able to make the piece effervesce even a little.

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JEAN PIERRE AUMONT hasn't much to do as the errant husband, but brings something of a gamin charm to the role of his equally errant offspring. Faye Emerson, in ravishing gowns, is a soothing orb tonic. Gaby Rodgers is particularly good as the stepson's wife. Here is a young actress of genuine merit.

Salutes for valiance under fire should also go to Drew Thompson, Earl Montgomery, Lucille Patton and Marcel Hillaire.

Over the years, the Theatre Guild has provided us with such distinguished and rewarding fare that it is difficult to chide it for this momentary lapse from grace. We can only surmise that Husson's empty frolic must have read better than it plays. Perhaps "The Heavenly Twins" was more engaging in a Gallic milieu.

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ANYWAY, HUSSON has evidently attempted to bottle theatrical champagne. But he chose a bad vintage. It opened with a mild pop, but gave off no sparkle when poured on the Booth stage.

New York Post

November 6, 1955

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Theater Suffers a Misfortune

At the moment, I'm feeling apologetic toward "Island of Goats" and "Deadfall." In my foolishly optimistic view, they seemed to represent the ultimate in disasters in an otherwise stimulating theatrical season, but on Friday night the Theater Guild stubbornly offered at the Booth something called "The Heavenly Twins," the adaptation of a French comedy by Albert Husson, and it was dreadful. In comparison, the two earlier misfortunes appear triumphs of stagecraft.

What went wrong with "The Heavenly Twins"? Under the title of "Les Paves du Ciel," it was, I'm told, a hit in Paris. Its English translation was at one point in the hands of Louis Kronenberger, who writes brilliantly. It was produced by one of America's most famous theatrical organizations. The staging is attributed to Cyril Ritchard, a man of rare all-around talent. The cast contains such pleasant performers as Jean Pierre Aumont and Faye Emerson. Yet its dullness is excruciating.

Shooting Wife

It begins, by the way, with a handsome wife gayly shooting her dashing husband. But the suspicious fellow had put blanks in her revolver, and she has to kill him again. Then a touch of whimsical fantasy rears its jolly head. One of those stage representatives of the other world enters and transfers the spirit of the dead man into a grandfather's clock, where he reacts with mechanical noises to the affair his widow is carrying on with a young fellow who is his illegitimate son.

There are other merry little incidents. To name just one, the widow is being sought in marriage by a stuffy lawyer, who takes her to Palestrina concerts. That, of course, proves his stuffiness. Eventually, she gets around to shooting him, too. I don't feel I am giving away anything I should keep from you when I report that, in the end, it all turns out to have been either a dream or a story that the husband is telling his wife. This may give you an idea of the play's high imaginative level.

Was It Funny?

Although it is pretty difficult to believe, it is possible that at some point in its disastrous history "The Heavenly Twins" had some humor in it. It must have, or it could hardly have fooled so many otherwise sensible theater people into bothering with it. All I can say is that at the Booth Friday night it seemed utterly lacking in any suggestion of humor, wit, brightness, imagination or theatrical interest of the most modest sort. I'd be hard put to it to think of a play equally tedious.

In addition to Miss Emerson, who plays the wife, and Mr. Aumont, who turns on his Gallic charm as both father and son, the cast includes Gaby Rodgers as the son's gullible wife, Lucille Patton as a maid, Drew Thompson as the foolish lawyer, and Marcel Hillaire as the agent of the hereafter. All of them at least deserve citations for gallantry under fire, and I suspect Miss Rodgers might prove a striking young actress under happier circumstances. To tell you the truth, I didn't care much for "The Heavenly Twins."

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

November 5, 1955

Emerson and Aumont Decorate 'Heavenly Twins,' a Fragile Farce

By JOHN CHAPMAN

An adaptation of Albert Husson's Parisian sex farce, "Les Paves du Ciel," was brought to the Booth last evening under the title of "The Heavenly Twins" and with nobody in particular credited with the adaptation. When the comedy began its tryout its official interpreter was drama critic Louis Kronenberger, but by last evening he had withdrawn his name from the program for reasons I wot not of. Maybe he just got tired of it, or by it.

I didn't see the French original, but I'll bet 10 centimes that it had more zazz than this opulent Guild production. The piece at the Booth is played most attractively by three principal comedians—Faye Emerson, Jean Pierre Aumont and Drew Thompson—but it is just too polite to be French, sexy or sophisticated. As affairs progressed I found myself wondering what Miss Emerson would wear next instead of what she would say next. (The things she wore—suits, negligees, evening outfits and everything the healthy indoor girl might crave—were splendid, and so was what she wore them on.)

Fine Beginning

"The Heavenly Twins" is not a dull play, for it has some saucy ideas, but it is a trifle and it is very, very arch. Its best moment is its first. Here we are in a theatre attending a French piece and the house lights dim down as the orchestra finishes playing "The Last Time I Saw Paris," by Kern. We expect the traditional